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TO
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HUMAN RIGHTS, VIOLENCE AGAINST
WOMEN, AND DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

I am pleased to be here this afternoon to talk with you about human rights, violence against women and international development.

The relationship between human rights and social and economic development has not always been evident, nor have women's rights always been considered as human rights. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights applies to all people, the special forms of persecution based on gender have often been ignored. For example, in some countries gender is the basis for denying women the right to vote, travel, inherit, or divorce. Women are raped, within their homes and in large groups as a weapon of war, they are genitally mutilated and sequestered because they are women.

Discrimination which is deeply embedded in almost all societies is not only morally wrong, but it affects the society's prospects for sustainable development. Although women in some countries face greater discrimination and isolation from social and economic opportunities than they do in others, infringement of human rights based on gender is a problem which knows no geographic boundaries.

There are three points I want to talk about today. They are: first, the evolution of our thinking on gender bias as a common thread running through human rights, violence and development; second, the interrelationship between human rights, violence against women and development; and third, why sustainable development is not possible in the face of continued gender-based human rights abuses and violence against women.

Finally, I want to talk about what we at USAID are doing to empower women, not only because it is just, but also because without equality and full participation, democracy and sustainable development are not achievable.

THE EVOLUTION

Why have gender based human rights persecutions been neglected for so long? There are several reasons. First, the abrogation of women's rights often is perceived to be within the "private" or domestic, as opposed to the public sphere.

Second, gender based human rights abuses are often related to the unique reproductive and sexual role of women, a sensitive and usually private area -- and one that is especially subject to a double standard for males and females. For example, two thousand women who have been raped are now held in jail in Pakistan where rape victims may be prosecuted as adulterers.

Third, in many societies, females are seen as worth less than males. Continued son preference is evidenced by female infanticide, foeticide, bride burning and large gender gaps in education.

In developing countries as well as in our own society, violence and discrimination against women is a pervasive pattern which is inextricably entwined in traditional social values and often institutionalized in religious and political practices.

As a consequence, in most countries women have less social, political, economic and personal power than do men. Women's lack of power sharing exposes them to greater risk of abuse and the cycle continues, an all too frequent legacy from mother to daughter.

It is violence, or the threat of violence that maintains much of this structure of control which denies women the right to participate fully in their families, communities and societies.

At the First World Conference on Women in 1975, neither women's human rights, nor violence against women were key issues.

In 1979, the UN Commission on the Status of Women drafted the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women which was modified and adopted by the UN General Assembly and ratified as an international treaty. Despite its quick ratification, it received little attention until after the 1985 World Conference on Women in Nairobi at which violence against women emerged as an important issue. Only since then -- in the past 5-10 years have women's human rights and violence against women become global concerns. In 1993 the UN General Assembly

adopted the Declaration on Violence Against Women which includes education, research and legal programs aimed at traditions that either support or neglect violence against women.

Why and how have women's rights and violence against women come to the fore with such power in the past few years? I believe it has to do with another shift in our thinking and perceptions. This change stems from seeing women as victims to seeing women as agents of change. If women are no longer to be victims, they must expose those practices which in reality do victimize them. Abrogation of their rights and gender-based violence are two of the most blatant. There are many more subtle forms of discrimination.

For example, as more and more women have become heads of households, they have found themselves completely responsible for the welfare of their children. In this situation, many have discovered their opportunities for social and economic progress, and indeed survival, blocked by discrimination. Women have had to expose themselves to the abuse and risk of prostitution to support their families. In many refugee camps, women without husbands must trade sex, sometimes with the camp guards, to get their rightful share of relief supplies. Protection of women by their families is a double edged sword -- without it women are prey to exploitation and violence from other men -- with it women often lose their right to participate in society as individuals.

There has been a growing awareness by women themselves that they simultaneously make tremendous contributions to their families and societies, yet face daily discrimination and often the risk of violence, which threatens not only them, but also their children. This awareness has ignited not only an anger, but also an activism.

As women have begun to see themselves as actors, rather than perpetual victims they have organized and fought to expose the abuse of their rights. In the past twenty years, women's groups around the world, whether village-based or international have become more sophisticated in their thinking and their organizational skills. Women's groups, working with some governments --and I am pleased to say that the United States played a key role--fought and won the battle to recognize women's rights as human rights and to have women's rights placed on the agenda of the World Human Rights Conference in June 1993.

Although it is now on the international agenda, the worldwide outcry and action against gender-based violence came first, not from international bureaucrats, but from women throughout the developing world. Women lawyers in developing countries from Africa to Asia, have organized to help individual women and to put the issues of violence against women on national agendas.

Poor village women in India began a large scale grass-roots movement to close the local liquor shop, because alcohol consumption was the cause of squanderd wages and wife-beating. Women in Bangladesh were outraged when they received only 10% of their rice harvest rather than the 25% that had been agreed upon. A court ruled in favor of the women after they had demanded that officials enforce the agreement.

Finally, media exposure of the pervasive pattern of violence against women has reached men and women across the world, with illustrations of the special difficulties faced by women and the inadequacy of our current framework for dealing with violence against women and women's rights. A recent U.S. News and World Report story has been titled "The War Against Women."

The leadership shown by women and the common bases for gender discrimination across the world have resulted in new and growing international alliances, which include both women and men, dedicated to changing the practices of abuse and discrimination which hold back both women and development.

HUMAN RIGHTS, VIOLENCE AND DEVELOPMENT

How does gender-based violence and the abrogation of women's rights relate to development?

The collection of gender-disaggregated data over the past decade is by no means comprehensive, but what exists has shown us much about the roles of women and men. For example, we know that women produce more than half the food in the world, that they are the bearers and rearers of the next generation and that in many countries nearly half of the households are dependent upon women. Cross-cultural studies of gender roles have revealed remarkably similar patterns of discrimination throughout the world, although the manifestations of this bias against women take different forms in different cultures.

The cost to society and development of practices based on gender stereotypes that value girls less than boys is enormous. Yet, despite the information available, the recognition of the links between violence against women and development have been slow in coming.

In many cases, the denial of women's equal rights to property ownership, divorce, travel, inheritance, means that women are barred from full participation in their societies and often from the means of economic self-reliance.

We have long recognized that violence directly damages women's health. We have much more recently seen how the threat of violence against women may force them into situations where their survival is at risk from other causes. For example, the

spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa is primarily through heterosexual relations. Yet, despite information on the disease and its transmission, women often cannot get their partners to use condoms and cannot avoid sex for fear of violence. In these cases, the threat of violence and abuse of women's rights contribute to the transmission of the virus. Conventional information and education programs cannot change this situation.

Where the need to support themselves and their children leads women into commercial sex, the price of economic survival may be mortality from HIV/AIDS for them and their children.

In other cases, violence against women or the threat of it acts to deny women access to services. The threat of domestic violence may keep women from exercising their right to choose the number and spacing of their children and from practicing family planning.

Violence against women may occur before birth with female foeticide. According to one study of population ratios in India and China, about 75 million women are missing. Female foeticide, infanticide and the practice of giving less food and care to girls have resulted in these shocking statistics. (Sen, 1989.)

Physical security is a consideration in sending girls to school in many places. The reality of the threat is borne out by the rape of 71 and the suffocation to death of 19 school girls in Kenya by their male schoolmates in 1991. Kept out of school because their security cannot be guaranteed, girls are denied an education.

Child prostitution and the trafficking of women and children is clearly a violation of fundamental human rights principles and covenants. The 1993 State Department Report on Human Rights Practices chronicles a desperate situation. Many women and children are duped into prostitution with the promise of a better life. They are sometimes turned over to the trade by their own families. Their inability to speak the local language, combined with their economic and social vulnerability renders them nearly helpless in the face of those who have virtually enslaved them. The primary responsibility for stopping such trafficking rests with governments. However, in addition to putting pressure on governments, development projects which provide alternative sources of income for girls and women are important.

The massive raping of women in the former Yugoslavia is not only a tragic result of the conflict there, it is a weapon of war.

One of the most harmful traditional practices is female genital mutilation which has affected an estimated 74 to 100 million women alive today. The practice continues in many

African, and some Middle Eastern and Asian countries. An estimated 2 million girls per year or 6,000 girls per day undergo the procedure. The consequences of this practice in its most extreme form include hemorrhage, death, shock, life-long infections, pelvic inflammatory disease, infertility, transmission of HIV/AIDS, and complications in childbirth, including maternal mortality.

This practice, which has spread with increasing immigration to Western countries, including the United States, leaves girls and women not only physically, but often also psychologically traumatized.

When all these practices are taken together as a pattern, it becomes clear that the prospects for democracy and sustainable development are indeed significantly affected by how women are treated.

WOMEN AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable development depends upon the full and productive participation of all members of society. Where half of the population is handicapped by human rights abuses and or discrimination which harms them physically and mentally, undermines their value and self-confidence and serves to deny them access to educational, political and economic opportunity, lasting development is not possible.

Without the free and full participation of all members of a society, democracy is more a mirage than an institution. Yet, women must not only be "allowed" to participate, they also must share power with men--without an equality in power sharing, participation will be hollow.

USAID Chief of Staff Dick McCall said that we must give "top priority to the empowerment of women and the protection of their human rights through education, increased economic opportunity, family planning and health services and support for indigenous women's organizations.

Secretary of State Warren Christopher has said at the World Conference on Human Rights, "violence and discrimination against women don't just victimize individuals; they hold back whole societies by confining the human potential of half the population."

Roxanna Carrillo in her United Nations Development Fund for Women publication, "Battered Dreams: Violence Against Women as an Obstacle to Development" eloquently states:

"Fundamental to achieving development for women must be increasing their self-confidence and their ability to

participate in all aspects of society. Violence against women is in direct contradiction to these development goals. It disrupts women's lives and denies them options. It undermines women's confidence and sense of self-esteem at every level, physically and psychologically, and it destroys women's health, denies their human rights and undermines their full participation in society. Where domestic violence keeps a woman from participating in a development project, force is used to deprive her of earnings, or fear of sexual assault prevents her from taking a job or attending a public function, development does not occur."

What is the cost to society and the world of discrimination against women, enforced by violence or the threat of it?

We know that the education of girls provides one of the best, if not the best, return on investment of any development activity (estimated by L. Summers to be in excess of 20%). Women who are educated have fewer children, healthier children, higher incomes, more options and a greater role in the community. Yet, the gap between male and female school completion rates remains enormous in many countries. The link between violence against women and lack of attention to women's rights in general and the low educational levels of women must be taken seriously if the education gaps between males and females are to be narrowed.

Women's reproductive function exposes them to special health problems which, under certain circumstances, may be hazardous to them and their children. Without access to family planning services, health care and adequate nutrition, women and their children face increased morbidity and mortality. Access to services may depend not only upon their availability, but also on whether they are free to use them.

Women's and children's nutritional status may be compromised by poverty or by a "males first" norm. Where women are threatened away from the services by their partners, or denied access to adequate food, they cannot participate in aspects of the development process which are important to them personally, to their children and to their societies.

All of these conditions are exacerbated by the lack of rights women enjoy and the violence that enforces their dependent role. In turn, these social and economic conditions render women more vulnerable to further abuse and violence.

The cost of violence towards women that is now borne by societies is becoming more apparent, although it is very difficult to quantify the total costs given available information.

WHAT THE UNITED STATES IS DOING

There are several ways in which we must approach the empowerment of women within the development process.

First, women's rights must be treated as human rights.

Second, violence against women or the threat of it -- as a means of control or coercion-- must be taken seriously as an impediment to development by governments and development assistance agencies.

Third, women must be empowered and supported as agents of change rather than passive victims.

Fourth, the conditions of women's lives that leave them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation must be changed.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS AS HUMAN RIGHTS

The United States takes women's rights as human rights seriously. The State Department has strengthened its monitoring of abuses of women's human rights in its annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. The U.S. is giving priority to the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination against Women and has asked the Senate to take up ratification of this Convention immediately following action on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination.

We are supporting the inclusion of women's rights in the upcoming International Conference on Population and Development and in the Fourth World Conference on Women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The U.S. supported the inclusion of the rapes in the former Yugoslavia conflict as war crimes in the War Crimes Tribunal. USAID is supporting a number of activities in refugee camps in Croatia, including food and medicine and counselling to women who have suffered rape.

The U.S. also supported the appointment of a Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women at the UN Human Rights Commission. This position was approved last month.

USAID is supporting a number of indigenous women's organizations and non-governmental organizations operating in areas in which there is trafficking of girls and women in Asia. Lack of economic opportunity is an important underlying factor in this practice and USAID is training women who are at risk, in a variety of industry-related skills. Girls are also being educated to be suspect of strangers that promise them wealth if they will run away with them.

The United States believes that female genital mutilation is a violation of human rights. At the same time, we recognize that it is a deeply entrenched cultural practice held in place by numerous beliefs and means of social enforcement. USAID is taking steps to support indigenous women's groups in Africa working to combat the practice and to include, wherever possible, information and education about its consequences in USAID supported health, family planning and democracy programs. We have also given support to a Conference by the Inter-African Committee on Harmful Traditional Practices which will be devoted to female genital mutilation beginning in Ethiopia on Monday.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Provision of information about their legal rights and legal aid services is one means of empowering women supported by USAID.

USAID has a history of support for legal rights education and legal assistance to marginalized women in every region of the world. Programs include: work with grassroots women's organizations, women politicians and advocacy groups in six Asian democracies based on civic education, legal aid and legal rights. Small short-term democracy related activities in Africa include the preparation, publishing and dissemination of documents and newsletters and handbooks on human rights for the general public.

The Nepal Women's Organization Women's Legal Service Project has received assistance to provide free legal services to needy women, increase general awareness of women's rights and train paralegals. There are now legal services branches in all regions of Nepal and village women are trained as paralegals.

In El Salvador radio and newspapers are used to disseminate legal information to the public and comic books are produced and distributed to groups such as high school students, women's organizations and labor unions.

In Eastern Europe, USAID supports the drafting and revision of constitutional, criminal, and civil laws including those dealing with protection of individual liberties and redress of discrimination on the basis of national origin, religion and gender.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

USAID's mandate is sustainable development through the promotion of democracy, environmentally sound development, population and health programs, and economic growth. Gender and violence against women play critical roles in all of these areas. We know that lack of economic opportunity is a powerful influence in the duping of girls into prostitution, that families in dire poverty often keep their girls at home to work in the house, that women's work is often unpaid, and that their income may be taken

by family members or middle men. USAID is working to change the conditions of poverty, lack of services, illiteracy and lack of information and education so that women will not continue to be as open to exploitation.

Economic opportunity is an important means of empowering women. A large USAID-supported women's cooperative in Indonesia, has been highly successful in offering credit, training, and savings services to its 16,000 members who are primarily middle and low income women.

A microenterprise project in the Dominican Republic supported by USAID provides Dominican women with credit. In Bangladesh, we have complemented the work of the Grameen Bank in successfully increasing basic income levels of poor rural women.

USAID is supporting family planning programs in nearly 70 countries and maternal and child health services in more than 35 countries. AIDS prevention programs have begun to focus on the unique problems of women in areas of high HIV prevalence.

Education for girls is an important priority and gender equity is being addressed in the 21 countries where comprehensive education reforms are being supported.

I want to conclude by saying that I believe that the issue of women's rights as human rights, the concept of violence as the means of coercing women and depriving them of their rights and the very real cost to social and economic progress from the denial of women's rights are among the greatest challenges faced in development today.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to meet with you today to discuss this important aspect of development.